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## GOVERNMENT

### Five Questions With: Frank Caprio

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*PROVIDENCE – Officials from around the country are meeting on Martha's Vineyard, Mass., for the annual World Pension Forum, a four-day educational conference for those who oversee endowment funds and public, corporate or Taft-Hartley pension trusts. This year's session is entitled "The Future is Now: High Tech, IT, the New Media."*



COURTESY STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

**GENERAL TREASURER Frank Caprio said he was first candidate for political office in the country to use Cox' On-Demand service for advertising.**

*R.I. General Treasurer Frank Caprio delivered opening remarks, along with fellow state treasurers Tim Cahill of Massachusetts and Denise Nappier of Connecticut. Caprio, a Democrat frequently mentioned as a 2010 candidate for governor, also was moderator for a panel discussion titled "New Frontiers in IT."*

*Shortly before leaving for Edgartown, he spoke with Providence Business News about how government is using information technology to become more efficient, the growing role of IT in politics, and what he thinks Rhode Islanders will be looking for the next time they choose a*

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*governor.*

**PBN: You're scheduled to deliver the opening remarks at the World Pension Forum. What do you plan to tell the audience?**

**CAPRIO:** What we've done in Treasury here in Rhode Island is try to make the office as customer-friendly as possible, and most of that has been by implementing technology. We brought in a state-of-the-art call center for the 50,000 either current or retired customers that we have within our retirement division. ... When we came in, the way the calls were dealt with was in an old-fashioned receptionist style – one person would answer the phone, and then direct that question to one of the employees in that division. We've changed that, and now we have a call center where we'll have a number of specialists who can answer most questions on the spot, so you don't need to start transferring people to voicemails. Then, also, people interact via the Web – if there's a form they're looking for, we can e-mail it right to them.

I look at that, really, as a first step in the changes we would like to see. The next step would be what I'd call an on-demand chat component, which some major corporations have, where 24 hours a day you could interact with the customer-service division [of his department]. I don't know if we'd be available for a whole 24 hours, but I'd like to extend the regular working day and make it more user-friendly for the weekend hours.

It's leveraging technology. And as a management tool, I can see the volume of calls and/or e-mail issues that we're dealing with, and how quickly we resolve any open issues, if there are any open issues at the end of the day. The technology side has made that very, very interesting to follow.

**PBN: You're also planning a new initiative to put more spending records online. How will that work?**

**CAPRIO:** We're going to be the first department in state government [out of the 50 altogether] to put all our spending online in as close to real time as possible. So when we do that – we have a target date [to start putting the information up] within the next 90 days – we will be showing other departments that it's possible, in this day and age, to have that transparency for all spending going on in this department.

[However,] even though we're treasury, people may say, "Well, you're writing all the checks for the state, can you get all the state checks coffers online in real time?" But we're the last step in that process, and we cannot disclose information from certain departments without their formal sign-off. Even though we're paying the bills for them, we're not in receipt of all the information necessary to back up that spending.

What I'd like to do is be a model – lead by example – and then take our program to other departments to implement it statewide. ... It's an exciting time. For a state department to be putting that information up, I think, sends the message to the taxpayer that's paying the bills that this information is there for them to look at – and when you talk about disclosure, it's been the more eyes looking at it, the better.

**PBN: More generally, how do you think state government is doing in embracing technology?**

**CAPRIO:** The current financial state that the state is under is providing an opportunity for the state to leverage technology. Many of the people who are

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retiring now started their careers in the 1970s, when most of the work day in any office – not just government but any office – was done with pen and paper, and the old green lead sheets.

Today, clearly, that's not how business is done. So, as this wave of employees that started their careers in the '70s now are retiring, it's imperative that the departments are restructured in a way that leverages technology, and that positions aren't just filled in a way to refill all the vacant positions. I know, in this department, we've seen that play out where we've seen some retirements and we've been able to combine what some people do down to one person – and that's just because of the technology that's available, whether it is data on spreadsheets on the computer and analyzing of those, reconciliation of bank records – and it can be done in a different way than it was 20 years ago.

**PBN: That sounds good, but do you find that state employees and their unions are resistant to those sorts of changes?**

**CAPRIO:** I'm just speaking for treasury, but in treasury we've had very strong cooperation with the union officials we interact with, and I think the reason that can happen is we said now we have provided opportunities for those in the union to move up in the organization. ... We try to put in place incentives for people to know that they're appreciated, know that we want excellence, and from what I've seen, it's working. We've realized savings in areas. It's getting better and more efficient.

**PBN: You're known for being one of Rhode Island's more tech-savvy campaigners. We hear a lot about the impact technology is having on national politics, but do you see it influencing state politics, as well?**

**CAPRIO:** It will be an ever-evolving process. I enjoy looking at the current landscape and saying, "How can we go a step further from what's currently expected and available and get your message to new people?"

The last electoral cycle, we used the on-demand TV system, [becoming] the first candidate in the country to post a biography piece on the Cox On Demand menu. We had to get approval from Cox national in Atlanta, and it was a paid ad process, but it didn't feel like that to the user. It felt like a movie posted on the on-demand menu. And then we posted 30-second spots to get people to look at it.

So that was taking the current technology and applying it to getting your message out in a political race. And I'm looking at the current landscape, and there'll be opportunities for people who want to look at the current landscape and see how they can even take that and use it in a way to get their message out in a way that's different from what's currently being offered.

I think, for candidates running now, if they think, "I can put a Web site up and that'll be enough." Well, that's not going to differentiate you enough from others who want to reach interested parties. To use technology in a way that others aren't using – I've seen in my limited exposure that that sends a message to the people you're trying to reach. You're not doing things in a cookie-cutter way, you're doing them in a creative way, in a way that's well thought-out.

**PBN: Bonus question: You've got more cash on hand than any other potential candidate for governor in 2010, according to the most recent figures from the secretary of state's office. What do you think Rhode Islanders will be looking for in a governor two years down the line?**

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**CAPRIO:** People want results. I think we've seen a model over the last two decades where you can point fingers at the different branches of government and not have the change that Rhode Islanders are looking for, so I think that will be a big theme going forward, not just for statewide races but for the local races: Who has the experience and the track record to get things done?

It's a serious job being involved in public service, and if you're hiring someone - if you ran a small business - you'd like someone with good experience, that's shown that they have the track record you're looking for to advance your small business.

In this case, the voter in Rhode Island is looking for someone who can bring about change in Rhode Island - but someone who can get it done, not just someone who can come out with a plan and point fingers. So I think that's what Rhode Islanders will be looking for in a governor.

*The World Pension Forum, formerly Pensions 2000, was founded in 1992 to provide "graduate-level fiduciary education" to senior executives at the pension and endowment funds. For more information about the group, its current session on Martha's Vineyard, Mass.; or its upcoming sessions in New York City (Oct. 2: "A Discussion of Race & Gender in America") or Abu Dhabi and Dubai (Nov. 15-21: "Dubai and Abu Dhabi: Pearls of the Gulf"), visit [www.WorldPensionForum.com](http://www.WorldPensionForum.com).*

*For news and information from the R.I. Office of the General Treasurer, visit [www.treasury.ri.gov](http://www.treasury.ri.gov).*

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